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OF MEN AND ANIMALS: HERGÉ'S *TINTIN AU CONGO*, A STUDY IN PRIMITIVISM

I. *The genesis of Tintin au Congo: a primitive, primitivistic album*

Tintin au Congo can arguably be considered as a primitive album in Hergé's *œuvre*—or at least in the most prominent and substantial part of it, the world-famous *Les Aventures de Tintin* series—since it was only preceded by *Tintin au pays des Soviets*, an “adventure” that, due to its rarity, had long become “something of a myth in the world of the strip cartoon” (Peeters, 27) when a facsimile edition of the original version was finally published in 1981. *Tintin au Congo* is so ostensibly and naively permeated with primitivistic and colonialist prejudices that it has long been dismissed by critics and the author alike as a historically dated, gross and all-too obvious caricature. The greater part of the most prevalent stereotypes and tropes of the primitivistic “canon” are indeed to be found in this album, including the image of the Other as simultaneously alien or exotic and familiar or “true-to-type”¹. Admittedly, the Belgian creator of *Tintin* significantly revised the initial album (1930) for the color version (1946), deliberately dehistoricizing and generally toning down the overtly colonialist ideology of the 1930s.² As I hope to show, however, this ideological stance can still be traced in the new version as more than just vestigial residue, only in a more complex or insidious way than its seemingly transparent primitivistic outlook might suggest. Behind the flagrant immediacy habitually perceived and decried there may be found a *displaced*—perhaps more powerful—type of primitivism, weaving its way into the superficial fabric.

As a preliminary to a reassessment of the album, some of the comments the author made (or did not make) on *Tintin au Congo* in the course of conversations he had with various interviewers need to be reviewed. The most salient point, perhaps, is that Hergé appears repeatedly reluctant to discuss the album at all (a statement like “*Passons, sans plus tarder, à l'album suivant*” in an interview with Numa Sadoul (143) encapsulates his overall stance), except in simultaneously apologetic and defensive terms. In the rare instances where *Tintin au Congo* is indeed touched on by its author, the album is essentially presented as a piece of commissioned work. Hergé claims to have been literally

1. This is consonant with Homi Bhabha's definition of the *ambivalence* of colonial mimicry as “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a *subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*.” (126).

2. For a more detailed account of this process, see Apostolidès (44–45).

pushed in that direction by Father Wallez, the then director of the Belgian catholic daily, *Le XXè Siècle*, whose weekly comic supplement, *Le Petit Vingtième*, was to feature *Tintin au Congo*. Hergé dutifully complied, biding his time for a more personal project, *Tintin en Amérique*:

“Pourquoi et comment ai-je fait le Congo? . . . En réalité, j’aurais préféré envoyer Tintin directement en Amérique après son retour de Russie. Mais l’abbé Wallez m’a persuadé de commencer par le Congo: “Notre belle colonie, qui a tellement besoin de nous et pour laquelle il faut susciter des vocations coloniales”, taratata tarataboum! Ça ne m’inspirait pas beaucoup, mais je me suis rendu à ces arguments, et en avant pour le Congo!” (Sadoul, 143)

One may well question the ethical validity of “je me suis rendu à ces [ses?] arguments”, but of more importance, perhaps, is the fact that this line of argument is directly linked to the ongoing polemic over Hergé’s putative racism—most visibly reflected in *Tintin au Congo*, according to his detractors—and his ties, if not his affiliation, with Belgian right-wing movements in the interwar years³. The issue inevitably comes up in the interviews, and Hergé’s self-exonerating counter-move or “line of defense” is no longer based on the influential and hierarchical impact or pressure of one particular individual but on the collective, dominant, mainstream ideology of a specific period in time. In other words, the paternalistic, colonialist perspective pervading the album must be contextualized and historicized:

“C’était en 1930. Je ne connaissais de ce pays que ce que les gens en racontaient à l’époque: ‘Les nègres sont de grands enfants’ . . . Heureusement pour eux que nous sommes là! etc . . .’ Et je les ai dessinés, ces Africains, d’après ces critères-là, dans le plus pur esprit paternaliste qui était celui de l’époque, en Belgique. Plus tard, au contraire, dans *Coke en stock*—et même si l’on parle ‘petit nègre’ -, il me semble que Tintin fait assez la preuve de son anti-racisme, non? . . . C’est comme avec les romanichels des *Bijoux*. L’attitude de Tintin et celle du capitaine Haddock sont identiques: ils prennent leur défense, à l’encontre de tous les préjugés. (. . .) Pour le Congo, tout comme pour *Tintin au pays des Soviets*, il se fait que j’étais nourri des préjugés du milieu bourgeois dans lequel je vivais.” (Sadoul, 74)

Hergé’s plea *pro domo* hinges on a twofold contextualization since, beside the ideological, historically specific, prejudiced impregnation, one has to take

3. For a front page update on this controversy, see Hervé Gattegno’s “Tintin et les fascistes”.

into account Tintin's (that is, Hergé's) personal evolution as well. The hero's antiracist attitude in the rest of the production (a point that in itself would need to be examined) would seemingly testify to its author's enlightened, reformed ways and views. Which is not to say, however, that Hergé is prepared to repudiate or disown his "youthful indiscretions" pure and simple: "En fait, *Les Soviets et le Congo* ont été des péchés de jeunesse. Ce n'est pas que je les renie. Mais enfin, si j'avais à les refaire, je les referais tout autrement, c'est sûr. Et puis quoi qu'il en soit, à tout péché miséricorde!" (Sadoul, 74). One may assume that Hergé's underlying argument is that he would now make a different album, simply (only?) because the circumstances, the ideological context (postcolonialism), people's sensibilities and values, and accepted norms have changed. Are we then to infer that the Belgian artist's repentance is a mere facade, or at best an ethically dubious way of going with the flow? His professedly increased (albeit belated) tolerance and opening to what he himself calls the Other—"au fur et à mesure que les années passent, j'éprouve plus de respect pour l'Autre", he declares apropos of his Eurocentric depiction of the Incas in *Le Temple du soleil* (Hamel & Peeters, 9)—appears to be related to a major turning-point in his life—his milestone encounter with a Chinese student, Tchang Tchong-jen: "(...) c'est lui qui m'a fait prendre conscience de la nécessité de me documenter sur un pays et de construire un récit." (27). This, of course, stands in sharp contrast with Hergé's attitude in his early days when he erred through ignorance and lack of proper firsthand documentation, relying solely on secondary sources and hearsay. His friendship with the Chinese student allegedly opened his eyes to the necessity of a more objective, or at least a more personal, source of information as well as to a better understanding of other cultures and civilizations (Sadoul, 75).

To return more specifically to *Tintin au Congo*, another key point made by Hergé is an explicit, unequivocal (as opposed to his previously unregretful or, at best, ambiguous attitude) act of contrition for the cruelty against the local fauna displayed throughout the album. Interestingly enough, a non-specific question from the interviewer ("Aimez-vous les animaux?") prompts a spontaneous, precise reference to *Tintin au Congo*: "Oui, beaucoup. Et justement, j'ai du remords d'en avoir fait tuer ou souffrir un trop grand nombre dans *Tintin au Congo* . . . Comment ai-je pu me montrer d'une cruauté aussi effroyable? Je n'ai pas fini de le regretter, comme autant de mauvaises actions que j'aurais réellement commises! . . ." (Sadoul, 123). A bit later on in the same interview, Hergé suggests that his humanlike, humane yeti in *Tintin au Tibet* may have been a way for him to atone for the sinful violence perpetrated against animals in *Tintin au Congo*: "Je voulais faire du yéti un être presque humain, peut-être en guise d'expiation pour tous ces animaux que j'avais massacrés jadis dans *Tintin au Congo*!" (182). In my view, this is far from being a mere side issue in the album. Significantly enough, Hergé does not seem to see fit, or rather admits to being unable, to provide a rational answer for the question he puts to himself ("Comment ai-je pu me montrer d'une cruauté aussi effroyable?"), or to elaborate on this discrepancy and inconsis-

tency (no convenient historical contextualization is available at this point). This silence is perhaps one of the most eloquent clues to the album, and the question still needs to be addressed, if not answered: why are so many animals abused, tortured and killed? What is the hidden motivation subtending this seemingly gratuitous and incongruous slaughter—a sort of comic strip version of *La Légende de saint Julien l'Hospitalier*—"at the hands of" an avowedly animal-loving artist who at the time is "au cœur de sa période animalière" since "les bêtes l'inspirent à ce point qu'il en fera, presque coup sur coup, les héroïnes de deux bandes, en 1931: *Fred et Mile*, et *Tim l'Ecureuil*." (Ajame, 92)?

II. *Displacement: devouring and hunting*

On first reading, the omnipresence of wild animals throughout Tintin and Milou's tribulations on the African soil may seem to be little more than part of "local color": the "primitive beast", virtually turning up at every corner, is seen as dangerous, aggressive—a stereotyped symbol of a "wild", "non-civilized" territory. A closer examination, however, reveals that animals are conspicuously present not only in Congo but already on board the liner in the first section of the album; in addition, they are recurrently associated with orality, and more specifically devouring or castration. Indeed, the otherwise uneventful trip to the "dark continent" is punctuated by a series of perilous encounters between Milou and predatory, albeit familiar animals, that serve to provide a foretaste of the large-scale Congolese adventures and move the plot along. Things start off under unfavorable auspices for Milou when, chasing a spider, he breaks a mirror—a traditional bad omen ("Sept ans de malheur!", p.1, III, 3)⁴. Accordingly, the roles are soon reversed and Tintin's canine companion is successively attacked by a parrot that bites his tail and, after falling overboard, by a torpedo-fish that also targets his caudal appendage and a shark (the latter two, as exotic sea animals, are already part of the "primitive wilderness", as opposed to the spider and the parrot onboard the ship as a self-enclosed, "civilized" unit). Once in Congo, Milou will be bitten by mosquitoes, knocked out by the lashing tail of a crocodile he had mistaken for a log drifting on the river (p.12), abducted by a monkey (p.17), faced with a lion (p.22–3), swallowed up by a boa (p.34), chased by a charging elephant (p.39) and a raging buffalo (p.57). However, one should not get the impression that Milou is a helpless victim all along: in a surprising taming-of-the-lion scene (p.22–23), the little dog bravely rushes to his master's rescue and defeats his fearful opponent against all odds by tearing off its tail. The king of the beasts—now symbolically and metonymically deprived of its virility and regality—is enslaved, or at least reduced to a whining, obedient pet that can be

4. In addition to the page number, the second (Roman) figure refers to the strip and the third to the frame.

conveniently kept on a leash (p.24, II, 1). Similarly, Milou will later on castrate a human, the exposed evil sorcerer, by tearing off a piece of his long train (p.27, II, 1).

What is the significance of these repeated, predatory attacks on Milou's physical integrity and why is the little white dog the privileged target of the local fauna? If Tintin's life is also threatened by ravenous crocodiles (p.13, IV, & p.33) and a ferocious-looking lion (p.22, II-III), both intent on eating him alive—not to mention two leopards, a charging elephant and a herd of infuriated buffaloes—the titular hero is more of a figure of the hunter (more of which anon) than of the hunted. One may also observe that Milou is pursued by humans as well, most notably by a black carpenter wielding a handsaw (p.3, IV, 3) that the dog wrongly assumes to be the ship's doctor getting ready to amputate his swollen tail (another striking image of the fear of castration), and by the stowaway (p.5, III-IV). However, both incidents occur aboard the ship, while in the rest of the story, entirely set in Africa, Milou is the prey of voracious *animals* only. Such a devouring(-castration) complex can be read in strictly psychoanalytic terms⁵, but its broad psychosexual and cultural implications only emerge to the surface, I suggest, when it is repositioned in the light of the conspicuous absence of the cannibalistic (most particularly African) primitive topos⁶. Through Milou's several encounters with indigenous predators, this Western fear/fantasy (cannibalism) is in fact *transferred* to the animal realm. This displacement is all the more intricate and apposite since Milou, beside his white-colored coat, is the archetypal (Western) half-human, half-animal creature within an anthropocentric universe (another common primitivistic topos). Milou can thus be seen as a slightly displaced figure of the white man being castrated and cannibalized by feral, flesh-eating beasts which themselves constitute a homologous displaced image—that of an alien,

5. Serge Tisseron, for instance, emphasizes the traumatic foundation of a new relationship and notes that "la séparation des deux partenaires correspond donc, pour l'un comme pour l'autre, à de multiples menaces de dévoration. Situation unique chez Hergé, et qu'il est bien tentant de comprendre en relation avec les premières angoisses du nouveau-né." (25). Apostolidès, for his part, points out a similar devouring fantasy in Hergé's next album, *Tintin en Amérique*: "Le fantasme de dévoration parcourt l'aventure américaine de Tintin qui craint d'être 'broyé' dans les engrenages du modernisme. (. . .) Tintin tombe dans la chaîne des abattoirs et risque d'être transformé en corned beef (p.399-401)." (34). Interestingly, the meaning is in this case reversed, since the individual is here engulfed, devoured and literally made mincemeat of by the epitome of Western "civilization"—industrialized, mercantile, capitalistic America.

6. Conversely, the final section of *Le "Manitoba" ne répond plus*—the first album in the *Aventures de Jo, Zette et Jocko* series that was conceived around the same period—features a cannibalistic scene in prominent terms: the two young heroes are captured and literally force-fed (p.48, IV, 2-3) by the African-looking islanders ("Ce sont des anthropophages!", p.49, I, 3) as prospective gourmet food!

savage, anthropophagous primitive people whose aggressive orality is also suggested by their stereotyped, undifferentiated wide, fat-lipped mouths.

However, there is also a sadistic side to this masochistic fantasy, and an opposite movement is already discernible in Milou. Indeed, while generally assuming the comic role of the cowardly, self-aggrandizing braggart running away from predatory creatures, he is at times capable of acting courageously. In the very first strip of the album, he is seen showing off complacently, Tartarin de Tarascon-like (Apostolidès, 57), to an awed canine audience ("Oui, j'en avais assez de mener une petite vie monotone. Alors, j'ai décidé d'aller chasser le lion . . .", p.1). Ironically enough, his delusions of grandeur eventually do come true, and after unexpectedly defeating the lion, he addresses his adversary in paternalistic terms, using the "vous" form and acting as if he were lecturing a disobedient child: "Comment, c'est encore vous? . . . Allez-vous bientôt cesser de faire le méchant?" (p.23, IV, 3), "Et ne recommencez plus, hein! . . . Ou je vous arrache impitoyablement ce qui vous reste de queue!" (p.24, I,1). Beyond the comicality of the scene, one should note that the *fear* of castration has been reversed into a *threat* of castration. In other words, the primitive can in his turn be cannibalized by the Westerner. Another way of accounting for the recurrent attacks of wild animals on Tintin and Milou would then be to view them as a necessary, preliminary pretext or excuse for—or even as a proleptic "deculpabilization" of—the decimation of the local fauna, or, more exactly, the enactment and the fulfilment of the sadistic and patriarchal fantasies of the white man as big game hunter (another recurrent trope of primitivistic literature⁷).

As a matter of fact, the extreme and frequently unorthodox violence of the hunting methods used by Tintin seem to be implicitly motivated by the fact that primitive beasts are literally impenetrable: Tintin's bullets successively bounce off the crocodile's skin ("Rien à faire! . . . Ma balle a fait ricochet!", p.13, I, 3)—a literal illustration of the common phrase "as hard as crocodile skin", as it were—, the elephant's hide ("Malheur! ma balle a fait ricochet!", p.38, IV, 2) and the rhinoceros's carapace ("Rien à faire! Mes balles n'arrivent pas à percer sa carapace . . .", p.56, II, 3). These examples suggest that the African beasts represent the primitive Other as well: there is something utterly abnormal, non-animal/non-human in them when they are judged by Eurocentric criteria. As Milou, a respected mouthpiece of the Western animal realm, observes about the rhinoceros, "Il est blindé, ma parole!" (p.56, II, 3): the Congolese rhino is not so much a living being as a piece of machinery, an armored vehicle, a machine of war. Such an exceptionally impregnable entity asks for (that is, implicitly justifies) a commensurate line of action. "Comment faire pour en venir à bout?" (p.56, II, 3): Tintin soon finds a drastic solution

7. See, for example, chapter 3 of Donna Haraway's *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*, "Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden".

by drilling a hole in the monster's bulletproof hide and blowing it up to shreds with dynamite! By the same token, after being hurled into a pond by a fuming buffalo, Tintin, whose "*réputation est en jeu*" (p.58, II, 3)—and whose resourceful and inventive skills do appear to be inexhaustible when it comes to slaughtering the local wildlife—, immediately proceeds to wash out this affront by using the latex flows from two rubber trees as a catapult to knock the impudent animal dead. There only remains for Tintin to take a picture of his trophy with Milou proudly posing on top of it (p.59, II). In fact, the last section of the album (p.53–61) where these particularly cruel assaults occur is an entirely autonomous unit—not even a germane addendum since the main plot is over on page 53 when the whole criminal ring is cracked. After a weeklong respite, a restless Tintin feels the need for some action and adventure: "*Mon vieux Milou, voilà huit jours déjà que nous nous prélassons dans ce palace. J'en ai assez. Demain matin, nous repartons. . .*", p.53, III, 2). This final part starts off as a peaceful photographic safari but soon turns, as illustrated above, into a couple of slaughter episodes in which the hero (and, supposedly, the western reader by proxy)⁸ can indulge his hunting fantasies.

One should further note that this two-way process—the western animal/man cannibalizing/being cannibalized by the primitive animal/man—is also an illustrated exercise in radical difference, in the unbreachable gap between two cultures. Just as the denizens of the jungle cannot be appropriated, or even destroyed, by the usual means (including violent ones), Milou cannot be digested by the huge boa: "*Ça va mal! Je devrais prendre un peu de bicarbonate de soude . . .*" (p.34, III, 3). The dog's tail and paws eventually stick out through the snake's skin; Tintin then does not hesitate to cut through the snake's body to extricate Milou, and to make the villainous animal bite its own tail. This burlesque episode might be construed as the reciprocal "inassimilability" of two immiscible worlds. For once, the animal's life is spared but in retaliation it is made to feed on itself.

Hunting then appears to be another displacement of the primitive man/Western issue to the animal sphere. Just as the natives are stereotyped figures who all share the same facial features (another common trait is their equally stereotyped broken pidgin French or "*petit nègre*"), the fifteen antelope killed by Tintin are all identical in his eyes (p.15–16)—another implied vindication of yet another massacre. The dead antelope look gracefully asleep and Tintin does not show or express any remorseful feelings or any pangs of conscience. On the contrary, he promptly reassesses the situation in down-to-earth terms: "*En tout cas, nous voilà assurés de ne pas manquer de viande fraîche! . . .*" (p.16, III, 3). Needless to say the Africans are never shown as hunting people, except on rare occasions when they are seen as poor, incompetent, uncoura-

8. This extradiegetic use of the hunt implies a sort of "encore" to the theme, as if this alone is what really produces reader gratification and is therefore repeated for "extra kicks".

geous hunters who need the help of the seasoned white hunter. In the lion-hunting scene, for example, a helpless, frightened villager, after the rest of the hunters has been disbanded, begs the titular hero to act as a savior: "Missié blanc, toi y en a sauver nous! Li seigneur lion li devenu enragé!", to which a matter-of-fact Tintin self-assuredly replies: "Ça va: nous arrivons . . ." (p.23, IV, 1). Likewise, the black chairmen carrying the colonial sedan chair where Tintin is regally seated are instantly scared off by an approaching leopard and take to their heels, leaving Tintin to his own destiny (p.53, IV). Already aboard the ship, Tintin had had to dive to save Milou from the sharks, the cowardly black sailor on duty being himself too afraid to risk his own life (due to his incompetence, he had only made things worse by hitting Milou on the head with a lifebelt, in the first place) (pp.6-7). In a later scene, the arrows of the m'Hatouvou tribesmen fail to reach a targeted Tintin who has resorted to a "high-tech" trick—a concealed electromagnet (p.30). Therefore, the natives are not fit for hunting not simply because they are cowards⁹ but also because of their lack of technology, another fundamental tenet of the primitivistic gesture, as I shall presently try to demonstrate.

III. *Mimicry: a decontextualized, parodic appropriation of Western "culture"*

Disguises abound in Tintin and Milou's adventures in Congo: the famous reporter dons the hide of a skinned monkey in order to rescue an abducted Milou (p.17-18), the evil sorcerer puts on the Aniotas' leopard-costume in an attempt to execute Tintin (p.31), Tom the stowaway disguises himself as a missionary to fool Tintin (p.42) who later avenges himself by passing himself off as Tom to unmask Gibbons, Al Capone's right hand on the African continent. Finally, Tintin and Milou slip into a giraffe outfit so as to get closer to the shy creatures and shoot a "superbe documentaire" (p.56, I, 1). This widespread resembling-dissembling activity, at once part of the plot and of the symbolic structure of the album, is emblemized once again by another representative of the local wildlife, namely the monkey/ape—the mimicking animal *par excellence* (together with the parrot, that plays a cameo role at the beginning of this album aboard the ship, and will be featured as a leading character in a later album, *L'Oreille cassée*). Apes are prone to imitate the white man in *Tintin au Congo*. They first save Tintin from a perilous situation by burying the infamous Tom under a deluge of coconuts: "Des singes! . . . Ils m'ont vu lancer cette noix de coco, et ils m'ont imité avec plus de succès!"

9. Examples of this characteristic cowardice commonly shared by all the natives abound throughout the album, from Coco (p.14 & 21) to the evil sorcerer who displays a stereotyped slave mentality when Tintin, whom he was intent on killing, saves him from a boa's deadly embrace: "Toi pas tuer moi! . . . Pitié, missié Blanc! (. . .) Sans toi, moi être mort . . . A présent, moi être ton esclave, ô Blanc généreux!" (p.31, IV, 3 & p.32, I, 1).

(p.15, II, 1)¹⁰. Later on, in the elephant-hunting episode, as an exhausted Tintin dozes off momentarily, a young monkey grabs his gun and inadvertently shoots the pachyderm dead (p.41).

In this "univers carnavalesque où hommes et animaux échange[ent] leurs attributs" (Apostolidès, 68), the reverse is also true and the white man can in his turn imitate the indigenous ape. In order to rescue Milou from the paws of his simian abductor, our hero has to "employer la ruse" (p.17, I, 3), another traditional trait of primates. He then feels no qualms about shooting and skinning an "innocent" congener of the impudent captor. Once costumed with the dead animal's skin, "Tintin-the-apeman" climbs up a tree and, after a short bargaining phase, retrieves his canine companion in exchange for his pith helmet (p.17, II-IV). This of course is another instance of the displaced and recontextualized encounter between whites and primitives discussed earlier. Moreover, this tropic bartering process does not stop there: the ape catches up with Tintin and Milou, and next wants to swap the pith helmet for Tintin's gun. The situation rapidly flares up and eventually turns into a fool's bargain for the "native" as Tintin coercively recovers both of the white man's symbols—his pith helmet and his gun (p.18, I-II). The white man is not to be trifled with and his attributes are not for the taking. This is almost, one might argue, an encapsulated micro-history of the early economic conditions of colonialism.

Furthermore, the ape—as a half-animal, half-human creature (or rather a crude, primitive version of it, and it is thus quite significant that the ape abducted Milou, a much more refined, western representative of this "hybrid-ity")—is conventionally positioned halfway on a Darwinian scale. Once again, the wild animal is a substitute for the black man: in order to deal with the primitive (animal/man), Tintin-the-white-man, while climbing up a tree, actually has to climb down an imaginary, evolutionary ladder from his higher "civilized" status as a European to a lower rung. This interpretation is also congruous with and actually reinforced by the fact that the African natives are consistently presented as overgrown children (sometimes literally so, as when Tintin mistakes an old Pygmy for a child, p.49, I). Mimicry is characteristically both an animal(istic) and infantile stage: just as the ape tried to appropriate Tintin's distinctively Western belongings, the Congolese "chil-

10. It is particularly interesting to note that in the section of *Le "Manitoba" ne répond plus*, mentioned earlier, where a cannibalistic ritual is about to be performed, the two youngsters are rescued from the cooking pot by a troop of monkeys—led by their own pet, Jocko, a domesticated, "Westernized" monkey—bombarding the anthropophagous natives with coconuts: "C'est Jocko! (. . .) C'est lui qui nous a sauvés! . . . C'est lui qui commandait les autres singes!" (p.50, II, 3). This album thus features an encounter with cannibals on a literal, human level as well as a displaced structuring of the relations between the Westerner and the primitive (in terms of hierarchy and political leadership) on a metaphorical, animal level.

dren" strive to imitate the European "adults" in many ways, most notably through a parodic, degraded appropriation of Western consumer goods¹¹.

Clothing plays an important part in this mimetic process. The all-African, exulting crowd welcoming Tintin and Milou as liberating saviors—or even as "enfants du pays" since, to some extent, this celebration looks more like a homecoming than just a hearty welcome—and carrying the "national" heroes shoulder-high in triumph is a carnivalesque medley of Western and tribal accoutrements. The natives are shown wearing tribal feathered headdresses, shields, spears and grigri necklaces, as well as felt hats, boaters and even bowlers, waistcoats, sports shirts, ties and stiff collars (p.9, IV, 1). Even the highest-ranking individuals are nothing short of outrageous caricatures in the rest of the album: the king of the Babaoro'm tribe, for example, is a burlesque version of the "roi fainéant" sitting in a wooden chair in lieu of a throne with his gaitered feet resting on a crate, smoking a European-looking pipe, wearing a cardboard crown, a ring in his ear, a ruff of a sort around his neck, a mayor's sash across his bare chest and a sword by his side, a tattered leopard skin around his waist, and holding a rolling pin in his hand! By the monarch's side stands an equally ludicrous and incongruous guard, stripped to the waist, wearing gold braid, a cocked hat à la Napoleon and flaming red breeches, and holding a blunderbuss in his hand (p.21, IV, 1). The king of the m'Hatouvou tribe will also later be seen smoking a cigar and fanning himself while sitting on a stool to which a turtle is tied up! (p.28, IV, 1). In both cases, the onomastic burlesque ("Babaoro'm", "m'Hatouvou") speaks for itself. Another farcically dressed and lazy crowd is the black train-passengers that confronted Tintin in the previous scene. Tintin's car gets stuck in the tracks of a railroad line and is hit by a local train. Much to everybody's surprise, the car is hardly scratched but the train goes off the rails. The clothes worn by the colorful passengers stepping out of the train are all a grotesque, out-of-place caricature of European garments and can only be perceived by the average Western reader as a ludicrous form of *disguise*: one old man with an umbrella, naked to the waist, is wearing Western pants and a fedora; another local in blue shorts and oversized brown boots is wearing a high-ranking military official's jacket (complete with a star-shaped medal and stripes) and wielding a broken riding saber; another younger African, stripped to the waist, is wearing a boater, a striped tie, a stiff collar, starched cuffs and a long straight skirt; a fat lady is wearing a fur coat with a stole, a fancy feathered hat and "local" rings around her naked ankles (the only touch of "local color" in her attire) and does not seem to mind the tropical heat! (p.20, I, 1). The grotesque in these examples is generated by a particularly ludicrous type of mimicry resulting from the fragmentary appropriation and *decontextualized* reproduction of bits and pieces from Western consumer society. The overall impression

11. On the mimicry/parody paradigm, see Homi Bhabha's illuminating work—his essay "Of mimicry and man: the ambivalence of colonial discourse" in particular.

is that of a *guignol*, as Roland Barthes has it, which perniciously helps confirm Western readers' reductive, infantile vision of "primitive" art and customs:

"Au fond, le Nègre n'a pas de vie pleine et autonome: c'est un objet bizarre; il est réduit à une fonction parasite, celle de distraire les hommes blancs par son baroque vaguement menaçant: l'Afrique, c'est un guignol un peu dangereux." (66)

In *Tintin au Congo*, the primitive is indeed seen as a deformed, "grand-guignolesque" reflection of the white man. As Homi Bhabha has it, "If colonialism takes power in the name of history, it repeatedly exercises its authority through the figures of farce." (126).

The same process can be found in technological matters. In the train episode, for example, the railroad tracks are unrealistically crooked. As for the train station, although it proudly displays the usual French-language signs ("CHEF DE STATION", "Défense de traverser la voie sans l'autorisation du chef de gare", p.21, II), it is a mere pagoda-hut; last but not least, the train itself cannot withstand the impact from a car. This lack of sophisticated technology and competence appears to be compounded by the natives' "innate" laziness, yet another primitivistic troping of underdevelopment. In effect, the train-passengers are presented as more eager to blame Tintin-the-white-man, and to feel sorry for themselves ("Toi y en a méchant blanc!", "Regarde quoi toi y en a fait au pauvre petit Noir!", p.20, I) than to get down to work and remedy the situation. After a perfunctory apology, our hero imperiously restores order ("Silence!") and takes charge—not without some difficulties, however, as he is dealing with incompetent, workshy natives ("Moi y en a fatigué", "Mais . . . mais . . . moi va salir moi . . ."): "Allons, au travail! (. . .) Au travail, vite! Vous n'avez pas honte de laisser ce chien travailler tout seul (. . .) Allez-vous vous mettre à l'ouvrage, oui ou non?" (p.20, II-III). Tintin therefore assumes the "expected" role of the white leader: he exhorts the locals to buckle to, he directs, controls and supervises the maneuver, and his leadership finally finds expression in an at once concrete and symbolic image when he tows the train along with his car, thus being literally in the lead. Thanks to his superior (technical) knowledge, Tintin is able to put the locomotive (literally) and the helpless natives (figuratively) back on track.

In the tribal war between the Babaoro'ns and the m'Hatouvous, Tintin finds another opportunity of distinguishing himself by his "technoculture"—an electromagnet hidden behind a tree attracting the enemy's arrows. This episode is another occasion for Hergé to indulge the average white reader's belief in his military superiority and to ridicule the laughable inadequacy of the natives as warriors. The king of the m'Hatouvous proudly predicts that "Mon armée, équipée à l'européenne, et bien entraînée, aura facilement raison des Babaoro'm." (p.29, I, 1), as he salutes his parading troops—a caricatured version of the seasoned colonial army (and of African battalions in colonial armies): the leading soldier wears a huge bearskin in the manner of Napoleon's

"grogards", another a shako, still another a Zouave's fez! This parodic mimicry also includes the m'Hatouvous' military weapons: "l'artillerie lourde (. . .) en batterie" is made up of a single ancient blunderbuss mounted on a caster base that dramatically backfires (p.29, IV). The natives are too incompetent to maintain their outdated equipment and are no match for a single, unarmed, smart white man. On the whole, the tribal societies in *Tintin au Congo* are, therefore, a burlesque image of the acculturation process—a parodic, decontextualized transfer of Western "culture" in kit form.

In striking contrast, Tintin's technical feat allows him to indulge another primitivistic fantasy—the white man made king by idolatrous natives: "Les m'Hatouvou sont des braves et le Blanc-qui-n'est-pas-atteint-par-les-flèches est leur roi!" (p.30, II, 3). A similar apotheosis had occurred a few pages before with the rival tribe as, with the help of the advanced technology of the West (he had—implausibly—filmed and recorded a nocturnal conversation between the plotting sorcerer and his white accomplice, Tom), Tintin had unmasked the two villains. Once the sorcerer—also a figure of parodic mimicry with his heteroclit (another sign of a pell mell, decontextualized appropriation of Western items) headdress made up of a saucepan turned upside down (a madman's emblem of a sort), a shaving brush and a doctor's frontal mirror/light—is evicted, Tintin is naturally elevated to the supreme rank of "grand chef des Babaoro'm" (p.27, II, 2). The next morning, the white-man-become-king-of-the-natives assumes his new leadership with consummate skill, dispensing to his people peace and justice¹² as well as medical care (Tintin gives a feverish native a miracle treatment by administering him some quinine, p.28, I). Later on, at the mission, Tintin will fill in for the sick maths teacher and bring Western-quality education to his African students.

These examples also serve to illustrate the intricate relationship between religion and power. The black natives are homogeneously and uniformly shown as naive, gullible, easily manipulated children and superstitious idol-worshippers. When the m'Hatouvous' arrows fail to hit him, Tintin is immediately dubbed "tabou" and "grand sorcier" at whose feet the awed natives prostrate themselves (p.30, II, 1), just as the Babaoro'ms had earlier bowed down to the ground before their new idol after being enlightened by his "technological magic".¹³ One "religious" figure is replaced by another, and it re-

12. Solomon-like, Tintin reconciles two young men fighting over a boater who then walk away, arm in arm, each proudly and contentedly wearing one half of the hat (p.27, III-IV)—proving, once again, that the fragmented object, although divested of its intrinsic value and function, in other words rendered meaningless from a Eurocentric point of view, is just as good as the real thing for the primitives.

13. Similarly, at the end of *Le "Manitoba" ne répond plus*, the tribespeople are "matés" (p.52, II, 1) by a technological trick—the mad scientist's "rayon" used on them by Jo and Zette, who are subsequently lionized, crowned with flower wreaths and pronounced "tabou, c'est-à-dire sacrés" (p.52, III, 2).

mains a conjectural point whether the local situation has permanently changed for the better. For the sorcerer of the Babaoro'm tribe—whose evil influence and ascendancy are presented as detrimental to blacks and whites alike (he is a member of the Aniotas, a "société secrète pour lutter contre Blancs", p.30, IV, 3)¹⁴—religion is nothing more than a cover-up for personal empowerment and self-advancement. From the outset he perceives Tintin as a potentially threatening rival: "Ce petit blanc li a pris trop d'autorité. Bientôt li Noirs n'écouteront plus moi, leur sorcier. Il faut en finir avec li petit blanc." (p.24, II, 2). Needless to say, only the first part of this prediction will actually come true: the sorcerer and his equally malicious white ally will be evicted *manu militari*, and the local fetish will eventually be replaced by carved wooden replicas (virtually the only samples of primitive art in the album!) of Tintin and Milou—placed on top of two totemic pedestals—that a tearful, kneeling native and a local dog are seen worshipping on the final page.

The deification of the hero—a degraded mimicry of Western religion—is not however presented as a "barbaric", pagan, blasphemous personality cult, but rather as an innocuous "mythologie enfantine" (Apostolidès, 23). The almost full page final frame (p.62) is both an encapsulation and the moral of the whole story, as the natives (including animals, from the crying pink flamingo perched on top of a hut to the two tearful dogs reminiscing about "ce Milou, quel type!") are shown crying over and lamenting Tintin's inexplicably silent and sudden departure. Sitting at a table outside a parodied version of the European cafe, two sad-looking patrons fantasize about Tintin as the quintessential European ("Dire qu'en Europe, tous les petits Blancs y en a être comme Tintin"); a sobbing African holds Tintin's movie camera as a relic, which is ironically desacralized by an old man solemnly repeating a contextually incongruous Western legal regulation pertaining to lost objects: "Si li pas revenu dans un an et un jour, ça y en a être pour toi . . ."; a mother refers to Tintin as a role model for her temperamental child to look up to ("Si toi pas sage, toi y en seras jamais comme Tintin!"); an old bearded man prophesies that "Moi plus jamais y en verrai boula-matari comme Tintin!".

Congo is in national mourning, but Tintin, the iconic white man, who has literally vanished into (thin) air without leaving any forwarding address, has to move on to new adventures ("une nouvelle mission (. . .) un reportage à Chicago", p.61, III, 1) and does not show any trace of feeling or concern for the natives: "Adieu, Afrique où il me restait tant de choses à voir" (p.61, IV, emphasis added). The primitive land as an exotic, picturesque territory is open to the Eurocentric, touristic and/or adventurous gaze, but Tintin does not have a single thought for its (and his) people: in many respects, *Tintin au Congo*

14. This radically anti-white, anticolonial resistance is markedly dehistoricized in the new version. On the other hand, the "civilizing" action of the white missionaries is also played down and made only incidental to the main plot: "Lorsque nous nous sommes installés ici, il y a un an, c'était la brousse. . ." (p.36, I, 3).

is indeed "une petite mystique de l'aventure, coupée monstrueusement de toute préoccupation de sociabilité" (Barthes, 65). The album thus ends on a rather pessimistic note (that was perhaps not intended as such), with a symbol of the tragically and perennially asymmetrical relation of the West and the primitive Other.

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